



29 November 2023

His Excellency Daniel Ortega Saavedra
President of Nicaragua
Managua, Nicaragua

Dear Mr. President,

We write as members of the International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief (IPPFoRB). As a global network of parliamentarians from diverse political, religious, and geographical backgrounds committed to promoting and protecting the freedom of religion or belief for all, we write to express our deep and ongoing concern about acts of intimidation and repression towards faith institutions and religious leaders by your government.

As you know, Nicaragua is a signatory to the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the American Convention on Human Rights (ACHR) of the Organization of American States. ICCPR Article 18 and ACHR Article 12 provide expansive protections for the right of individuals and communities of believers to meet freely in worship, prayer, and study. The actions of your government violate these international standards.

In particular, we condemn the systematic harassment and targeting of Roman Catholic churches and leaders and the dismantling of [civil society institutions](#) throughout Nicaragua, many of which are also religiously affiliated. Specifically, we condemn the arbitrary imprisonment of Catholic clergy and, most recently, the expulsion of twelve detained priests from the country. We affirm the joint [statement](#) by the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights for Central America and the Caribbean urging your government to end repression against all religious leaders, actors or believers from all faiths, and to release all individuals arbitrarily deprived of their liberty, including Bishop Rolando Álvarez of Matagalpa, detained since an August 2022 raid. We remind you that Bishop Álvarez was arrested violently without a warrant, tried without due process, sentenced to 26 years in prison, jailed under inhumane conditions, and had his citizenship revoked.

Cases of repression and persecution forced deportations and bans on entry into the country, the criminalization of their pastoral activities, the prohibition of carrying out religious ceremonies, the police siege of their homes or places of worship, the closure of media outlets, universities and organizations belonging to these religious groups, as well as the confiscation of their property against other religions have also been reported. For example, the police have broken up Protestant worship services on six occasions, and at least four pastors have reportedly been prevented from entering the country. The State has also shut down nonprofit organizations and confiscated an evangelical Christian university. We condemn the actions that restrain the freedom to manifest religion or belief that may be exercised, either individually or in community with others and in public or private.



In addition, we are alarmed by the closing of civil society spaces, church-affiliated organizations, and private religious institutions without cause. For instance, we note the closure of the Jesuit Central American University (UCA) in August of this year, followed by the closure of seven Catholic radio stations. Terminating the legal status of these church-affiliated civil society groups and some 3,500 nongovernmental organizations for "safety" or "funding" reasons is disingenuous and harmful to citizens' right of religious expression. Your government's decision to shut down the OAS office in Managua earlier this year and your subsequent departure from the multilateral body makes dialogue on these issues difficult and displays an unwillingness to engage with international human rights bodies. We urge you to reconsider.

We also condemn the weaponization of governmental branches against faith leaders and their followers. For example, the labeling of Roman Catholic clergy as [terrorists](#) is deeply disturbing, as is their arbitrary detentions or expulsion simply for expressing their beliefs, speaking in opposition to a political party, or defending human dignity.

As a global network of over 300 parliamentarians representing 90 countries from North and South America, Africa, Asia, Europe, and Oceania, we, the IPPFoRB, urge you to uphold freedom of religion or belief for all in Nicaragua. We call for the immediate release of Bishop Rolando Álvarez and all arbitrarily detained clergy members, as well as for the reopening of the over one thousand nongovernmental organizations in Nicaragua, including church-affiliated ones, which were arbitrarily defunded or closed.

We, members of IPPFoRB, are willing to engage in a constructive dialogue on this matter. We are open to collaborating with the Nicaraguan authorities to find solutions that respect the rights and freedoms of all Nicaraguan citizens. We urge you to seize this moment to bring Nicaragua's laws and policies back into line with its freely undertaken international commitments.





Nicaraguans of all faiths and no faith deserve the right to live in accordance with their conscience. We respectfully urge you to take concrete action to provide freedom of religion or belief to all in Nicaragua.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter.

Sincerely,

The following parliamentarians support this letter in their personal capacity and not as a representative of their government, political party, or any other body. Additionally, the list encompasses advocates for freedom of religion or belief, including religious leaders, civil society organizations (CSOs) representants, and human rights defenders.



| Name | Country | Signature |
|----------------------|-----------------|--|
| Abid Raja | Norway |  |
| Nqabayomzi Kwankwa | South Africa |  |
| Sanela Skrijelj | North Macedonia | SANELA SKRIJELJ |
| Paulina Andrea Nuñez | Chile |  |
| Kasthuriraani Patto | Malaysia |  |
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